



**State of South Carolina**  
**Office of The Lieutenant Governor**

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**Silver Haired Legislature Plans 2007 Legislative Agenda**

(Columbia) -- Members of the South Carolina Silver Haired Legislature (SHL) began working on their 2007 legislative agenda Thursday (July 27). More than 80 seniors from across the state met to discuss ideas for improving the health and welfare of the state's fast-growing senior population.

Positive steps taken by state lawmakers on behalf of South Carolina seniors during the past legislative session were outlined by Nela Gibbons, Director of the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging. She thanked SHL Speaker Tom Lloyd of West Columbia and the other assembled SHL members for their efforts to help prepare South Carolina for the near future when the number of citizens 65 and older is projected to double to 1.3 million. "Thanks to your leadership, we have made some tremendous gains in the areas of senior health," said Gibbons.

Gibbons pointed to legislation passed in 2006 that:

- Strengthened the State Long Term Care Ombudsman program
- Stabilized a key funding source for senior center construction and local senior services by reforming the state tax on Bingo licenses
- Funded the geriatric loan forgiveness program, adding eight new geriatrician physicians to the less than three dozen specialists in the state.
- Created \$2.9 million in supplemental state funding designed to address waiting lists and expand the reach of programs such as home delivered meals, transportation services and other community-based services with a proven track record of improving the health of frail seniors

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"I don't have to tell you all that this is the first new state money that we have had for seniors in more than 10 years," Gibbons told the SHL members, "and this money will go 100% for expansion of services at the local level."

She also said in the past year 516,000 seniors signed up for Medicare Part D benefits, Mature Adults Count statistics were updated, and the Seniors Cube database project was launched to provide research into the effectiveness of senior programs. Some key areas of focus for the Office on Aging over the next year will include more work on the Seniors Cube, expanding the successful Aging and Disability Information Center pilot project in Aiken County to other areas of the state and emphasis on new projects that will help seniors with transportation needs, added Gibbons.

Lloyd reminded the group that they had encouraged the creation of the "GAPS" program that is helping seniors who have limited incomes with the cost of medications during the coverage gap or "doughnut hole" period of new Medicare Part D prescription drug plans.

"I don't want to be too pessimistic or too optimistic about it," said Lloyd, "I want to be realistic about it. We have done pretty well this year."

The Silver Haired Legislature was created in 1999 to specifically to advise the General Assembly on issues of importance to older South Carolinians. Participants are elected by districts in coordination with the state's 10 Regional Area Agencies on Aging. Lloyd is the current Speaker, and the Immediate Past Speaker is Roy Mathis of Charleston.

Silver Haired Legislators from all 46 counties in the state were represented at the meeting in the Solomon Blatt building in the state house complex, where members of the House of Representatives have their offices. After listening to the opening remarks by Lloyd and Gibbons, the group split into committees to develop policy proposals in five specific subject areas: consumer protection, healthcare, long term care and economic security, as well as a general committee tasked with looking at broader issues such as affordable housing and senior services.

In the fall, the group will reconvene for their eighth annual legislative session, meeting in the chambers of the South Carolina House of Representatives September 12 through 14 to finalize their legislative agenda for 2007. As South Carolina's senior population continues to skyrocket, the issues that affect this group are becoming increasingly important to state lawmakers. During their 2006 legislative session, SHL delegates heard from Lt. Governor André Bauer, named head of the State Office on Aging in 2004; Governor Mark Sanford; S.C. Speaker of the House Bobby Harrell; Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom; State Sen. Joel Lourie; State Rep. Nathan Ballentine; and State Rep. Denny Neilson, Chair of the Joint Legislative Committee on Aging.

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**(Photo & caption follows next page)**



**Speaker of the South Carolina Silver Haired Legislature Tom Lloyd of West Columbia addresses the group during their annual legislative committee meeting, Thursday, July 27 at the Solomon Blatt State Office Building in Columbia.**

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